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THE NON-VIRGILIAN AENEAS¹

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The character of Aeneas has impressed moderns so variously that one sometimes wonders just what the Romans thought of him. We expect different things of a hero nowadays, but, in the judgment of many readers, Aeneas falls so far short of the heroic in every respect that we instinctively question the reality of the Roman acceptance of him as their national hero, and we wonder how many Roman youths who read in the schools of his deeds and his sufferings took him as the model and the pattern of their lives. Their acceptance of the *Aeneid* can hardly be doubted.

My present purpose is to assemble some impressions of Aeneas, ancient and modern. I shall not discuss, except incidentally, the character as presented by Virgil, but shall merely put together some other ancient testimony on Aeneas, together with some reactions of Virgil's hero upon later readers. My own opinions, in most cases, will appear only by accident.

We first meet Aeneas in the various narratives of the Trojan War. I shall attempt to write his biography, with no effort to distinguish between sources or to reconcile differences. He was a member of the Dardanian branch of the Trojan royal house, but lived on Mount Ida instead of in Troy itself. Relations must have been close, however, as we find him going with Paris to Sparta on the fateful expedition after Helen.² He took no part in the earlier stages of the war, but when Achilles drove off his herds he entered the fight.³ Priam never paid him the honor that he deserved,⁴ but the people honored him as a god.⁵ His position as

¹ Read before the Classical Languages Section of the Pennsylvania State Teachers' Association, held at Philadelphia, December 30, 1919.

² The poem "Cypria" in Kinkel, *Epici Graeci*, I, 17; Dares *de excidio Troiae*, p. 11, Meister; Dictys *Bellum Tro.* i. 3.

³ *Iliad* xx. 91-92, 187-94.

⁴ *Iliad* xiii. 460-61.

⁵ *Iliad* xi. 58.

a warrior is rather peculiar. He takes a prominent part at the battle of the ships, fights bravely in the attempt to carry off the corpse of Patroclus, is unequally matched with Diomedes and later with Achilles, being rescued both times by divine intervention. In the fight with Achilles, Neptune rescues him and advises him to avoid the battle as long as Achilles lives, but no other of the Greeks may slay him.¹ After the death of Hector and Achilles, Aeneas becomes the leading figure on the Trojan side, although there is another and less friendly tradition which couples Aeneas with Antenor in the plot to deliver the city to the Greeks.² In one version of this story he turned later against Antenor and tried to drive him out of Troy—a traitor to the end.³ In another, he goes to Greece with Agamemnon, but, trying to cheat that monarch out of his captive Polyxena, he is compelled to seek safety in a hasty and stealthy flight.⁴

There is a curious passage in the *Posthomericæ* of Tzetzes, in which he interrupts his narrative, as I do mine at this point, to describe for us the Trojan leaders, male and female. I have derived much amusement from asking my classes what Aeneas looked like, but I have never found one so ill-disposed to Aeneas as to describe him as does Tzetzes: "Short and stocky, broad of chest, with light hair and fair skin, bald, broad between the eyes."⁵

In the list of Trojan aces, Aeneas, with 28 victories, ranks second to Hector with 31, while the next of the Trojans has only 4.⁶ Of the 28, Homer mentions only 6, but the period of the greatest martial activity on Aeneas' part lies after the death of Achilles and so outside of Homer's sphere. It is of course possible that those writers who make much of his achievements are influenced by the valiant warrior of the second half of the *Aeneid*.

There are several varying stories of the fate of Aeneas after the fall of Troy. I have mentioned two of these already in connection with the treason of Aeneas and Antenor. Homer seems to think that the family of Aeneas remained in the region around

¹ *Iliad* xx. 332 ff.

² Dictys *Bellum Tro.* iv. 22; Dares *de exc. Tro.* 47. 11.

³ Dictys *Bellum Tro.* v. 16.

⁵ *Posth.* 361 ff.

⁴ Dares *de exc. Tro.* 52. 10.

⁶ Hyginus *Fab.* clx.

Troy,¹ and indeed there are indications that there was a family of Aeneadae there who claimed certain hereditary privileges by virtue of this descent.² Attempts to harmonize this tradition with the official account of his migration to Italy may be seen in the suggestion that it was not the son of Anchises that went to Italy but another Aeneas, and the other suggestion that Aeneas did go to Italy, but later returned to the Troad and died there.³ The author of the *Ilias Parva* asserted that Aeneas and Andromache were taken prisoners by Neoptolemus and by him were conveyed to Greece.⁴ It would take a narrative longer than the third book of the *Aeneid* to recount all the places where Aeneas is supposed to have gone, and Virgil omits many of them. The traces of Aeneas are mainly philological. Particularly common are names of places or tribes that have a real or fancied connection with the names Aeneas or Tros. In some localities we find the hero worshiped along with his mother, but even here he is but a shadowy form. Gradually, however, the story of his wanderings crystallized into an orthodox version, being meantime merged with details from the story of the wanderings of Ulysses. This official version has its beginning in the tradition of Aeneas' departure for Hesperia—the western land. Stesichorus, if we may trust the *Tabula Iliaca*, represented him as setting forth for Hesperia, accompanied by Anchises, Ascanius, and Misenus.⁵ Thucydides says that there were or had been Trojans in Sicily,⁶ and Aristotle knows of the burning of the ships, but thinks that they belonged to Greeks driven out of their course, and apparently that there were Trojan women with them as captives.⁷ Gradually, as the theory of a Greek origin for Rome gained ground, and as the Trojans were thought of more and more as Greeks, it came to be assumed that Aeneas actually reached Latium and founded a city there. Just when, or by whom, the tradition of a visit to Carthage was added is uncertain. It appears in literary form first in the *Bellum Punicum* of Naevius, in which some surprising resemblances to the *Aeneid*

¹ *Iliad* xx. 300 ff.

² Demetrius Scepis ap. Strabo 13. 607.

³ Dionys. Halic. i. 53.

⁴ Tzetzes *ad Lycophron Alex.* 1263.

⁵ *CIG*, III, 6125.

⁶ vi. 2.

⁷ *Frg.* 609, Rose.

are found.¹ There is reason to believe that according to Naevius it is Anna who falls in love with Aeneas,² while there was another story that Dido committed suicide to escape a too impetuous suitor, Iarbas.³ Is it possible that Virgil contaminated the two stories? If so, the discussion of Aeneas in his relations with Dido assumes a new significance.

What manner of man is this Aeneas? In Homer he is at once important and incidental, as Saint Beuve remarks. He is a hero of great prominence, who usually fails to live up to our expectations of him. He is especially distinguished by the unceasing care and protection of the gods. This was of course no reproach to a Homeric hero. From the pattern set by Homer it was not well to wander far, and even the unfriendly Dictys says that the *sacra* of Apollo were under Aeneas' special care. This was the most striking attribute of the hero that Virgil inherited. As a warrior Aeneas was most conspicuous in those authors whose accounts supplement Homer's, but that was to be expected from what Homer says about him. Out of all the mass of references to Aeneas in other authors one gets of concrete characterization practically nothing. He is vague and shadowy, nothing more. Thus the one positive impression one gets of Aeneas is the one that appears so often in the *Aeneid*—his *pietas*. That the notion of *pious Aeneas* is older than Virgil is proved, if other proof is needed, by the fact that before Virgil's time he was the stock rhetorical example of *pietas*.⁴ This is the material of which Virgil was compelled to make his hero—a second-rate warrior, a favorite of the gods, marked out by them for a destiny perhaps too great for him, a form without substance, with one outstanding quality, *pietas*. Is it any wonder that Virgil had trouble in making him real to us?

I pass on now to opinions of Aeneas based mainly on the character that Virgil has painted for us. They range from the opinions of those who can see no good in Aeneas to those of the persons who can see no bad in him. Different people have found him always either odious or insipid; a cad; a hero; a namby pamby; a saint; a reflection of Virgil himself, with all the poet's gentleness,

¹ ap. Serv. in *Aen.* iii. 10; ap. Non. 474. 6.

³ Justin. 18. 6.

² Serv. in *Aen.* i. 198.

⁴ *ad Herenn.* iv. 62.

lack of self-assertiveness and practical ineffectiveness; an instrument of the gods, passive and passionless; a villain whose villainy is limited only by gentle Virgil's inability to conceive that quality. I suspect that our condemnation of Aeneas is due in no small degree to his treatment of Dido, and it is to that phase of the story that I shall confine myself. Brought up on chivalry, and trained to anticipate and to desire a happy ending, we are unwilling to accept the tragic ending of the Dido love story without condemning Aeneas, however wrong, artistically, any other ending of the story would be. I have suggested above that perhaps the story of Dido and Aeneas is original with Virgil, and, if so, we are given our best opportunity to see what creative power he has. It is this opportunity that I have used in bringing together these reactions of Aeneas upon later readers. My manner of treatment prevents exact references to modernizing rationalizers like Maurice Baring, to written and oral discussions by my classes, and to the more serious commentators like Henry, Lodge, Yeames, Rand, Sellar, Myers, Heinze, Glover, DeWitt, and others, but my obligations to them are no less real. I shall not attempt to present anything but a composite portrait. That portrait, I must admit, is unattractive. Why is it that in the case where Virgil had the best chance to use his own powers in depicting Aeneas he has so conspicuously failed as he seems to have done? Why, in other words, is our sympathy with Dido rather than with Aeneas? Did Virgil intend that to be the case? We read Homer's tale of the philanderings of Ulysses without a real pang, though we remember the faithful and long-suffering Penelope sitting at home. Why does Virgil produce the opposite effect?

No punishment great enough for the fate
Of Aeneas can I invent;
But may the fire of Dido's pyre
Be cold to the place where he's sent.

So writes one youthful but vengeful champion of the luckless queen, prefacing her bloodthirsty conclusion by elaborating Aeneas' plea of heavenly command. "The gods decreed it so" is her refrain. In a somewhat different mood Augustine tells us how he wept for Dido dead, that she killed herself for love, with no word about

Aeneas. It has often been pointed out that we must distinguish between Dido the queen and Dido the woman. The latter must and does win our sympathy; the former may not. *Carthago est delenda* in literature as in fact. I cannot believe that Virgil meant his readers to think of Antony and Cleopatra, but I can easily believe that when Virgil wrote the curse of Dido he wanted every Roman to feel the thrill of fear and joy that the prophecy had been fulfilled and Rome still lived.

The non-Virgilian Aeneas is in truth impersonal and unreal; he is a founder of cities and an instrument of the gods, and he is little more. The Aeneas of Virgil is these things, and, at least in his dealings with Dido, he is, in my opinion, something more: he is a human being, with some of the average human being's weaknesses. He, like Dido, is both personal and official. Virgil of course could not separate the two characters, and, being Roman, could not emphasize the personal side as much as a modern writer would have done, and here, it seems to me, lies the source of much of our dissatisfaction with the poet. A question still remains: Did Virgil really intend us to regard the desertion of Dido as a virtuous act? He is at great pains to provide Aeneas with all the public and private virtues, and would hardly have ventured to put this great blot on his fame if he had really considered it a blot. Does this not suggest that we should look for another explanation? I agree with the critics that Virgil does sometimes make his episodes larger than the whole work, but I believe that there is something more in his mind here. It must be remembered that there was no place for Dido in Italy. But it was not necessary to introduce her into the story at all. Virgil had to select from the unnumbered places where Aeneas was supposed to have gone or keep him wandering thrice seven years o'er every land and sea. Why then did he insert the visit to Carthage? I think that Virgil wanted the episode for its own sake, and also that he saw an opportunity to add something of his own to the Aeneas legend and, for once, to make of Aeneas a human being. There are some very human things about the Aeneas of the fourth book. Take for example the speech in which he attempts to answer Dido's complaints and reproaches (iv. 333 ff.). He was eager to depart, but certain practical difficulties

were at once apparent. How to get around the maddened queen was no small problem. He prepared his speech and waited for the most opportune time for delivering it. Dido however anticipated him and assumed the enormous strategic advantage of the offensive. Aeneas replied. His whole answer to what Dido actually said is contained in three lines—one-tenth of the whole passage. His first sentence is an elaborate acknowledgment of his obligation to her, of which she has said no word. Then follows his answer to her, after which he continues with his speech as previously prepared. His answer produces the effect we should assume: from self-pity and entreaty she turns to anger and reproach. The best we can say of Aeneas' answer is that it is feeble and lame.

Was Aeneas in love with Dido? I do not know. I suspect that Aeneas' heart was not likely to synchronize well with any other organ, but we must remember that that rare word *amor* is used when Aeneas meets the shade of Dido in the lower world.

It is often said that Aeneas was passionless. I do not believe that he is in this case. He has here a struggle with human weakness and passion, and he masters them. If I were an interpreter of the allegorical school, I should say, "Dido, dear children, is Temptation; Aeneas, the human soul; Italy is Heaven. The soul triumphs over Temptation and goes joyously on its Pilgrim's Progress toward Heaven." Aeneas finds himself in much the same position as does Joan of Arc in Schiller's play. Destiny has given both of them a mission for the good of others. Both give way to human love when human love is forbidden. Both of them finally triumph over their temptation, though in different ways.

I have suggested that Virgil saw a chance to contribute something to the Aeneas tradition. Aeneas was to be no longer a puppet, but was to be for a moment a man. Virgil could not create Aeneas out of nothing. He could not even remold him nearer to his heart's desire. He could not work a chemical change, but only a physical change. Thus the Aeneas of Virgil is a mixture. He is the Aeneas of tradition, the vague figure, the founder of cities, the plaything of destiny. Upon this Aeneas is grafted, not altogether successfully, a human Aeneas. Virgil was not free to do with Aeneas what he would. He only did the best he could. With

Dido the case was different. There was no ready-made Dido to start with. There was no need of compromise with tradition. The poet's creative power here made a character with greater unity and greater reality.

But I am dealing with the non-Virgilian Aeneas just now—with the Aeneas of you and me. Can we not think of him as a man and as a king? More than anything else he was to Virgil and to all Romans the founder of their city and the ancestor of the Julian line. If the woman outweighs the queen in Dido, the king outweighs the man in Aeneas. Human Virgil tried to make him for a time, but he could not divest him of his old character, nor did he wish to do so. Impulse and sentiment may make us sympathize with Dido the woman, but reflection must make us sympathize with Aeneas the founder of Rome. And though, like Virgil, I have tried to humanize Aeneas for a moment, I, again like Virgil, want you to remember the Aeneas who took as his motto *Italiam sequor*.